



# The Willingness to Redeem

## Summary and Goal

Another “kinsman redeemer” besides Boaz was capable of claiming Ruth for marriage along with Naomi’s property that she would inherit. However, this kinsman wasn’t willing to accept Ruth when he realized she was an outsider from Moab. This emphasizes the importance of Boaz being capable to redeem Ruth and willingly choosing to do so, in spite of her status as an outsider. Just like Ruth, we are unable to redeem ourselves from our rebellion toward God, but Boaz’s actions point us to God who willingly chooses to do what we cannot do for ourselves.

### **Main Passages**

Ruth 4:1-22

### **Session Outline**

1. Ruth’s Inability (Ruth 4:1-6)
2. Boaz’s Ability (Ruth 4:7-12)
3. Boaz’s Willingness (Ruth 4:13-22)

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### **Theological Theme**

Ruth’s story is a powerful illustration of the helplessness of sinful humanity. Boaz is an excellent example of the only One who is able to redeem sinful humanity from its wretched state.

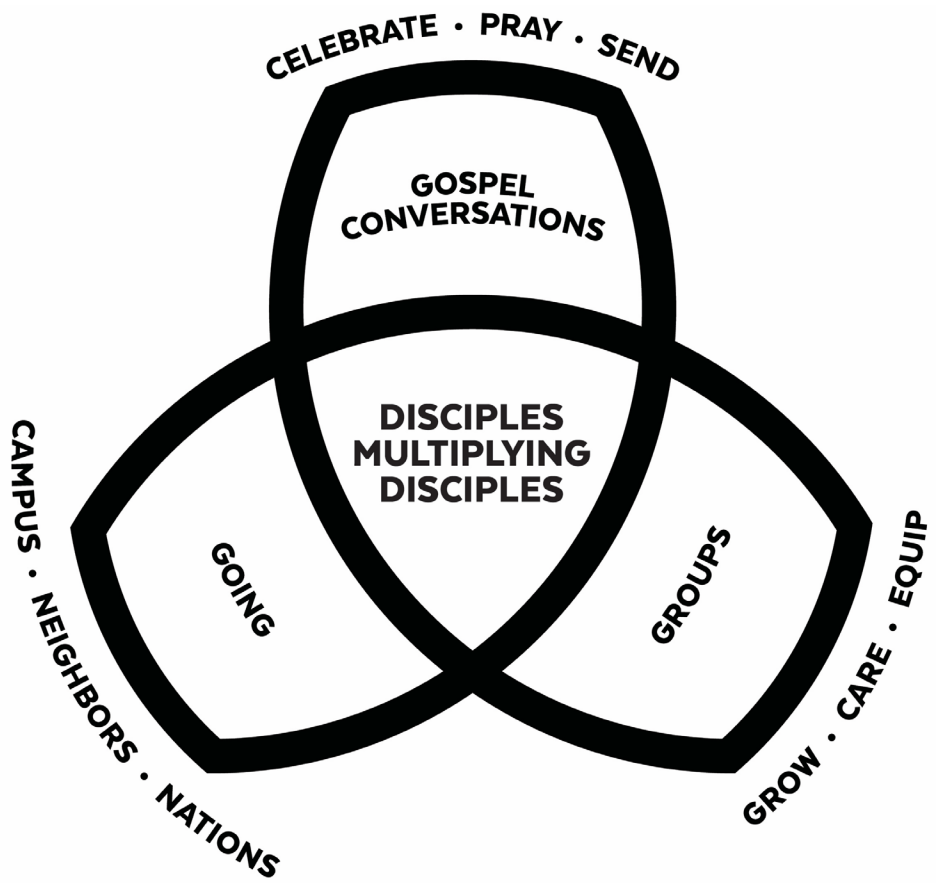
### **Christ Connection**

Just as Boaz was Ruth’s only hope for redemption, so too Christ is the only hope for people’s redemption before God.

### **Missional Application**

Jesus has commissioned all of His redeemed to go and call the lost to come and partake of His great rescue. Not all will come, but those who do will also be adopted into the family of God.

# Disciples Multiplying Disciples



# 4

## Session Plan

# The Willingness to Redeem

### Introduction

- ❓ Have you ever witnessed a real-life rescue? What happened?
- ❓ What are different scenarios in which a rescue may be required?

In Ruth Chapter 4, we witness a type of rescue. There was a helpless person in the way of danger (Ruth) and a willing and able rescuer (Boaz). This account is a reminder for Christians to rejoice in the rescue that has been carried out on their behalf. In Jesus, Christians have a Rescuer who is both able and willing. He has the power to save people from the punishment of their sins and His compassion moves Him to do so.

### 1. Ruth's Inability (Ruth 4:1-6)

Ruth was from Moab, and this made her an outsider. She was not part of the people of Israel, though she lived among them after she followed Naomi to Israel. She had no husband, no influence, and no prospect for advancement. She was, for all intents and purposes, a beggar in a foreign land.

- ❓ What could Ruth do to improve her status? How does this reflect the reality of all people who have sinned against God?
- ❓ What other accounts in Scripture illustrate this principle? Why is it important to continually remember our helplessness before God outside of Jesus?
- ❓ Application: In what ways can you see your own spiritual inability when you look back at life before Christ redeemed you?

## 2. Boaz's Ability (Ruth 4:7-12)

Ruth's redemption followed strict guidelines. Boaz could not simply claim her; protocols had to be followed, and there was another man who could redeem her.

- ❓ How does Boaz's ability remind us of Jesus' ability to redeem sinners?
- ❓ Why was it necessary for Jesus to be fully God and fully man to be able to redeem outsiders?
- ❓ Application: How does it make you feel to know that, despite your inability, Jesus was able to redeem you and is able to keep you into eternity?

## 3. Boaz's Willingness (Ruth 4:13-22)

As a recently widowed woman in a foreign land, Ruth faced a difficult future. In the midst of her pain, God graciously led her to Boaz, who married her and provided for her. Furthermore, the Lord blessed them with a son. In ancient Israel, sons were considered tremendous blessings because they would continue the family name. By giving Ruth a husband and a son, the Lord graciously redeemed Ruth's seemingly hopeless situation.

- ❓ Boaz was not only qualified to redeem Ruth but also willing to do so. The same is true of Jesus as our Redeemer. How does it change your perspective to know that Jesus not only is able to save you but also desires to do so?
- ❓ The book of Ruth concludes with a genealogy. Why do you think this is?
- ❓ Application: Considering the family line of Boaz and Ruth, what impact does this account have on the lives of Christians today?

## Conclusion

- ❓ How has your own life been changed because God's story includes seeking the lost? How can God's plan for the world change our church's story?
- ❓ The Book of Ruth is a wonderful story of God's faithfulness. Where have you seen God faithfully at work in your life in the past? Where do you need to trust His faithfulness now?
- ❓ Who do you know that needs to be reminded that God is in control and has a purpose for their lives? How might you encourage them to trust Christ in the midst of their difficulties this week?



## Expanded Session Content

# The Willingness to Redeem

### Introduction

- ❓ Have you ever witnessed a real-life rescue? What happened?
- ❓ What are different scenarios in which a rescue may be required?

Rescues may take place in any number of situations:

- A family trapped in a burning house.
- An exhausted swimmer too far from shore.
- A mountain climber with a broken leg.
- A flood victim clinging to a rooftop.
- A child trapped under the rubble of a collapsed house.
- A severely injured driver who was thrown from his vehicle.

All of these situations have in common the presence of immediate and grave danger, a helpless person in the way of that danger, and the need for a rescuer. Sadly, many such situations do not have a rescuer. Though compassionate people may be nearby, they may not be able to do anything to change the outcome. Or maybe there are capable people in the vicinity, but they do not care enough to take action. For a true rescue to happen, the rescuer must be both able and willing.

In Ruth Chapter 4, we witness a type of rescue. There was a helpless person in the way of danger (Ruth) and a willing and able rescuer (Boaz). This account is a reminder for Christians to rejoice in the rescue that has been carried out on their behalf. In Jesus, Christians have a Rescuer who is both able and willing. He has the power to save people from the punishment of their sins and His compassion moves Him to do so.

## Session Summary

Chapter 4 of the Book of Ruth consists of Boaz's arrangement of Ruth's redemption. The chapter is framed by an opening and closing at the "gate" with the "elders." The gate was the center of public life and assembly point for many business and legal transactions in the ancient near east. Throughout the chapter, both the verb and noun forms of "redeem" are used. Redemption is the theme of Ruth's story, which is why Christians have found it to be a vivid picture of Christ's work on behalf of sinners. Perhaps more than any other book in the Old Testament, Ruth reminds Christians of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. We are reminded of our estrangement in Ruth's situation, but Boaz represents the ability and willingness of our great redeemer, Jesus Christ.

### 1. Ruth's Inability (Ruth 4:1-6)

Ruth was from Moab, and this made her an outsider. She was not part of the people of Israel, though she lived among them after she followed Naomi to Israel. She had no husband, no influence, and no prospect for advancement. She was, for all intents and purposes, a beggar in a foreign land.

- ❓ What could Ruth do to improve her status? How does this reflect the reality of all people who have sinned against God?

Ruth was an impoverished foreigner, but surely she could take decisive steps to fix her situation, right? No, there was nothing she could do to change it. There was no amount of hard work or virtue that Ruth could demonstrate that would merit her full acceptance into the covenant people of God.

This mirrors the predicament of all people. The Bible makes it clear that every person has sinned, falls short of God's glorious standard, and that the wages for sin is death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). The bad news the Scriptures make plain is that every person is guilty of sin, but it gets worse. People are enslaved to and dead in sin. In other words, this sinfulness has rendered them completely unable to do anything to heal or save themselves.

- ❓ What other accounts in Scripture illustrate this principle? Why is it important to continually remember our helplessness before God outside of Jesus?

In Mark 9, we see an example of similar inability. A distraught father brought his demon-possessed child to Jesus to be healed. We can assume that this wasn't the first time the father sought help for his child. His situation was probably similar to the woman who had the issue of blood and had spent a lot of money consulting many physicians but gained no relief (Mark 5).

The fundamental problem here isn't that the child was in a terrible predicament (though that reality was bad enough). Rather, the problem is that the child was completely unable to help himself. This child could do nothing to rid himself of the evil spirit. He was completely incapable of putting a stop to the convulsions and could not keep himself from heading straight toward the fire or the water. The real problem was that, left to himself, the child's situation was completely hopeless.

One of the most important truths we can understand is that humanity is in a terrible predicament and can't get ourselves out of it. Before Christ, our situation was completely hopeless. We were dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). We had no way to remedy our terrible state on our own. We could not heal ourselves and no mere person could help us. We needed intervention from God. And that's exactly what God did. He is rich in mercy, and because of the great love He has for us even when we are dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:4-5).



Application: In what ways can you see your own spiritual inability when you look back at life before Christ redeemed you?

## 2. Boaz's Ability (Ruth 4:7-12)

Ruth's redemption followed strict guidelines. Boaz could not simply claim her; protocols had to be followed, and there was another man who could redeem her.

This other man could have redeemed Ruth, but he was unwilling. It is quite possible that he was also unable. If he had married Ruth, then any benefit that he would have received (Naomi's property) would then be passed down to the children he bore with Ruth. This means that not only would this man not receive any lasting benefit, but he would also be burdened with the care of both Ruth and Naomi. It is possible that he was not a man of much means and felt that he would be unable to provide for these two women or any children that came along.

Boaz was second in line to Redeem Ruth, though he was not obligated to do so. Furthermore, he was a man of means who was not deterred from redeeming Ruth because it would mean additional financial burden. It seems that Boaz had prospered in his business and was able to provide for these two women and any children he and Ruth might have.



How does Boaz's ability remind us of Jesus' ability to redeem sinners?

The Scriptures explain that Christ “gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name” (John 1:12). This incredible truth is no less than a miraculous change in position. Christ is able to take a child of the devil and make them a child of God (John 8:44). Jesus Christ is able to complete this redemption because of who He is.

Notice that John 1:12 makes clear that children of God are given the right; it isn’t earned. This right is a gift of grace that was made possible by Jesus’ good works, not the good works of those given the right to become children of God.

Jesus is able to redeem sinners because of His unique identity. He is both divine and human—fully God and fully man. This is why Isaiah prophesied “For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). Jesus, Mighty God, took on flesh, was born of a virgin, and lived as we live. This is the only kind of a Redeemer that could bring us back to God.



Why was it necessary for Jesus to be fully God and fully man to be able to redeem outsiders?

Jesus had to be fully human so that He could perfectly obey the whole law and earn true righteousness in the place of people. In this way, the righteousness that He earned as a man could be placed on our account. Moreover, how could Christ suffer the punishment for the sin of man if He weren’t fully man?

Jesus also had to be fully divine to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. A mere man would be unable to bear the unimaginable wrath of God against rebels. Jesus was able to endure God’s wrath and overcome death because He was fully God. Furthermore, because of His divine nature, Jesus’ sacrifice was perfect and effective. It isn’t difficult to see why the sacrifice of the divine Messiah is drastically different from the blood of bulls and goats (Heb. 10:4).




Application: How does it make you feel to know that, despite your inability, Jesus was able to redeem you and is able to keep you into eternity?

### 3. Boaz’s Willingness (Ruth 4:13-22)

As a recently widowed woman in a foreign land, Ruth faced a difficult future. In the midst of her pain, God graciously led her to Boaz, who married her and provided for her. Furthermore, the Lord blessed them with a son. In ancient Israel, sons were considered tremendous blessings because they would continue the family name. By giving Ruth a husband and a son, the Lord graciously redeemed Ruth’s seemingly hopeless situation.



-  Boaz was not only qualified to redeem Ruth but also willing to do so. The same is true of Jesus as our Redeemer. How does it change your perspective to know that Jesus not only is able to save you but also desires to do so?


## Obed

The name itself (Obed means “servant”) is probably a shortened form of Obadiah (“servant of the Lord”). First-time Jewish readers who arrived at this point in the story would have had their breath taken away as they discovered that the baby was none other than the father of Jesse, the father of David!


Not only is Jesus able to save sinners, but He is willing! Once, looking over Jerusalem, Jesus said, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matt. 23:37).

Jesus’ ministry was one of constant invitation. “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30). Jesus the Redeemer is compassionate toward the broken-hearted sinner. As Scripture says, “He will not break a bruised reed, and he will not put out a smoldering wick” (Isa. 42:3). He will never cast away those who come to Him (John 6:37).

God’s faithfulness, loyal love, and mercy are on full display in the Book of Ruth. Each of the names in the closing genealogy remind readers that those qualities extend to all people—not just Ruth and Naomi, and not just Israel. God didn’t come only to rescue and redeem Israel; He came to redeem people from every corner of His creation. The story of Ruth brought hope to a people who found themselves in darkness in the period of the Judges.

-  The book of Ruth concludes with a genealogy. Why do you think this is?

Ruth was the great-grandmother of King David, who was the righteous ruler God used to pull Israel out of their patterns of depravity. King David’s throne paved the way for the true and better David, the King of kings—Jesus Christ. He is the Messiah who once and for all saved Israel, and all people, from sin and death. If a foreign widow named Ruth gets to be a part of that story, there is hope for all of us who are equally unworthy. This genealogy opens our eyes to the hope and promises of the gospel.

-  Application: Considering the family line of Boaz and Ruth, what impact does this account have on the lives of Christians today?

## Conclusion

The story of Ruth reminds Christians of their great Redeemer. In Ruth, Christians see themselves: a stranger, impoverished, and outcast. But in Boaz they see their Redeemer: able and willing to redeem.

The Book of Ruth concludes with a seal of God's faithfulness. At every twist and every turn—every loss and death and complication—God was faithful. Even when the people in the story couldn't see what God was doing, His redemptive plan for Naomi, Ruth, and all of Israel was at work. And through Israel, God made possible the redemption of all people through the person of Jesus.

- ❓ How has your own life been changed because God's story includes seeking the lost? How can God's plan for the world change our church's story?
- ❓ The Book of Ruth is a wonderful story of God's faithfulness. Where have you seen God faithfully at work in your life in the past? Where do you need to trust His faithfulness now?
- ❓ Who do you know that needs to be reminded that God is in control and has a purpose for their lives? How might you encourage them to trust Christ in the midst of their difficulties this week?

## Prayer of Response

*Thank God for His infinite wisdom and mercy in sending Christ to dwell among His creation to complete the work of redemption on our behalf. Pray for our church that the joy and power of the gospel message would be evident in our lives. Pray also for the lost with whom you and your fellow church members meet each day. Ask the Lord to give you opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ with them.*

## Additional Resources

- *Judges and Ruth* by Mary Evans
- *Judges & Ruth* by Daniel Block
- *Judges, Ruth* by W. Gary Phillips

## For Next Week

### Memorize

*The women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you without a family redeemer today. May his name become well known in Israel.*

-Ruth 4:14

### Daily Readings

- Monday - Ruth 4:1-4
- Tuesday - Ruth 4:5-6
- Wednesday - Ruth 4:7-10
- Thursday - Ruth 4:11-12
- Friday - Ruth 4:13-17
- Saturday - Ruth 4:18-22

# Historical Context of Ruth

## Purpose

Ruth's covenantal faithfulness to her mother-in-law Naomi and her God provided a model showing that those who were not ethnic Israelites could be incorporated into the people of God through faith. If Moabites who joined themselves to the Lord could be accepted, there was hope for other Gentiles as well (Is 56:3–7). The book also effectively answered questions that may have been raised over the legitimacy of the Davidic line, given his Moabite roots.

## Author

The Talmud attributes the authorship of Ruth to Samuel, but the book itself offers no hint of the identity of its author. We can only speculate about who might have written the book of Ruth, and its provenance and date must be deduced from the internal evidence—language and style, historical allusions, and themes. The family records at the end and the explanation of archaic customs requires a date during or later than the reign of King David (1011–971 BC), though it could have been written as late as after the exile, when the issue of the inclusion of Gentiles once again became pressing.

## Setting

The book of Ruth is set “during the time of the judges” (1:1), a period of social and religious disorder when “everyone did whatever seemed right to him” (Jdg 17:6). Historically, this era bridged the time between the conquest of the land under Joshua and the rise of King David, whose family records form the conclusion of the book. It is not clear exactly when during the time of the judges the book belongs, but it opens with a famine in the land, which may have been the result of Israel's idolatry.

## Special Features

The book of Ruth gets its name from one of its principal characters, a Moabite woman named Ruth who was the ancestor of David and Jesus. After reading the book of Judges, which paints a dark and depressing picture of Israel, the reader is relieved to encounter Ruth. Although the book is relatively short, it is rich in examples of kindness, faith, and patience. It is one of the five scrolls that was to be read during the Jewish festivals, in particular the Festival of Weeks.

## Extended Commentary

### Ruth 4:1-22

4:1–2 Boaz immediately went to the gate of the town, the place where important legal and social matters were transacted in the presence of the town elders. When Boaz summoned the other redeemer, he literally said, Come over here (Hb) *poloni 'almoni*, a rhyming phrase equivalent to our “Mr. So-and-So.” Boaz gathered a quorum of ten elders as official witnesses.

4:3–4 As a widow Naomi could not sell Elimelech’s land; however, she could assign someone else the right to use that field until the next Jubilee Year. Rather than have control over the field go (or remain) outside the family, Boaz requested an intervention in the spirit of the family redeemer laws to buy ... back the use of the field. Since “Mr. So-and-So” was the primary relative entitled to redeem that property, Boaz was bringing the matter to his attention. If he did not redeem the property, Boaz himself was willing to act.

4:5–8 Along with the financial cost of redeeming the field, there was a social cost. The transaction also included a commitment to marry Ruth the Moabitess and thereby to seek to perpetuate the dead man’s name on his property. This is a reference back to the practice of levirate marriage in Dt 25:5–10, by which the brother of a man who died without male offspring was required to marry his widow and raise up a family in the name of the dead man. In this case, there was no legal obligation on either “Mr. So-and-So” or on Boaz, yet Boaz asserted a moral obligation to do so. At this, “Mr. So-and-So” backed away from his earlier enthusiasm. Ironically, his concern to protect his own name rather than committing to raise up heirs to the name of Elimelech led to him being left nameless. In seeking to serve self first, he inadvertently undermined his best interests. It is instead Boaz whose name would become famous (Ru 4:11) in Bethlehem. His decision was confirmed by a legal gesture that was archaic even at the time of the writing of the book—the removal of a sandal, which was given to the other party.

4:9–12 By receiving the sandal, Boaz committed himself to redeem Naomi’s property, to marry Ruth, and to perpetuate the names of Elimelech and Mahlon on their patrimony. The blessing of the elders (vv. 11–12) may simply have been conventional for married couples in Bethlehem, but it had a greater significance for Boaz and Ruth. Through Ruth, Boaz would indeed become famous and have his name remembered in Bethlehem. The link with Perez, the son Tamar bore to Judah, invites a comparison and contrast between Ruth and Tamar, two foreign women who became part of Judah’s genealogy through very different means. Thus Ruth entered the lineage of the Messiah (Mt 1:5).

4:13–17 Although for ten years in Moab, Ruth had been unable to bear a son for Mahlon, through the Lord’s direct intervention she immediately conceived and bore a son for Boaz. The child would be a comfort for Naomi in her old age (lit “would sustain her grey hair”); he would be her family redeemer who would provide for her needs in her declining years. He was named Obed, a short form of Obadiah, which means “Servant of the Lord.” Though no one could bring back Naomi’s husband or sons, now she had a daughter-in-law whom all recognized as better to you than seven sons—an astonishing accolade in the ancient world.

4:18–22 The story concludes with a linear genealogy linking the child, Obed, backwards and forwards. It traces his roots back to Perez, the child born in Gn 38 out of the dubious relationship between Judah and a foreign woman, Tamar. It also traces his progeny on to King David, who is highlighted not simply because he was a great king but also because he was the Lord’s answer for the anarchy of the days of the judges, in which this story took place (1:1). The family records thus show us that the Lord had been pursuing bigger plans than just bringing together two worthy individuals or restoring the emptiness of a Judean widow. Their story formed part of the bigger plan to provide the Redeemer, Christ Jesus, whom Israel needed.<sup>1</sup>

## References

1. *CSB Study Bible: Christian Standard Bible*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017.

## Author Bio

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Daniel I. Block is the Gunther H. Knoedler professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. He holds degrees from the University of Saskatchewan, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and University of Liverpool and has lectured and preached in Russia, Denmark, and China. A prolific writer, Block's previous books include the Judges, Ruth volume of B&H Publishing Group's esteemed New American Commentary series.

### **W. Gary Phillips (Judges, Ruth)**

W. Gary Phillips grew up in Chattanooga, went to school at Red Bank and Baylor School, and then earned degrees from Vanderbilt University (B.A., 1971), Dallas Theological Seminary (Th.M., 1975), and Grace Theological Seminary (Th.D., 1985).